

WASHINGTON (September 30) - The House of Representatives today unanimously passed a resolution formally accepting a statue of Helen Keller from the State of Alabama for permanent display in the U.S. Capitol.

In remarks on the House floor, Congressman Spencer Bachus (AL-6), said, "The story of Helen Keller has inspired generations of Americans. It is especially meaningful to Alabama because she is one of our own. Her statue will vividly remind us how a young girl from the rural south overcame tremendous challenges to become a symbol of hope and determination for people throughout the world."

The approval of the House resolution follows similar action by the Senate earlier this week. The statue will be unveiled in an official ceremony in the historic Capitol Rotunda on October 7.

Helen Keller, who was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama in 1880, overcame the loss of her sight and hearing at a young age to become a world-renown educator, advocate for the disabled, and humanitarian.

Congressman Bachus' floor remarks follow.

FLOOR STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE SPENCER BACHUS (AL-6)

S. CON RES. 41 – HELEN KELLER STATUE ACCEPTANCE

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2009

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The story of Helen Keller has inspired generations of Americans. It is especially meaningful to those of us from Alabama because Helen Keller is one of our own. Her statue will vividly remind us of a young girl from the rural south and how she overcame tremendous challenges to become a symbol of hope and determination for people throughout the world.

As my colleague Mr. Lungren described, Helen Keller was not even two years old when an illness left her unable to see or to hear. That would be difficult enough for a child and for a father and mother to deal with today with all our advantages. Imagine how devastating it must have been for a family in the Deep South during the 1880s.

Some might have mistakenly assumed a child who was blind and deaf may never aspire to more than to be cared for with compassion. Such is certainly not the normal mindset of children with physical limitations, as many of us know. They have the same aspirations and hopes and dreams as their fellow children. It certainly was not the case with Helen.

Helen Keller's parents also refused to accept limits on their child's life, just as Helen – when she grew older – refused to be limited by her disabilities. They had a deep and strong faith that their daughter could be educated and live a rich and full life. And while Helen could not yet express it, she had that same determination.

Ultimately, that would bring them in contact with Anne Sullivan and lead to the scene which is memorably depicted by the new statue: the miraculous moment when Helen Keller, with water running over her hands, finally understand what a "word" meant and that word was "water."

Very few statues can tell a story. This one does. But, of course, it is only the beginning of the story of Helen Keller and what she chose to use her life for and that was to help others. As an educator, as an advocate, as a humanitarian, she showed there was no obstacle that cannot be overcome. Her life reminds us to cherish every member of our society because each person has unique gifts and blessings from God.

The statue will be very popular, especially with children, and conveys the important message that whatever life's challenges, nothing should ever hold us back. We live in a country where you can overcome any obstacle and achieve your dreams if you work hard and possess the desire to succeed.

There are many people involved with this project that the Alabama delegation wishes to acknowledge.

My colleague Parker Griffith mentioned Governor Bob Riley and his wife Patsy. They were two of the guiding forces behind a statue that is such a great gift from the people of Alabama to the people of our nation. Governor, I hope you and the First Lady look upon this as one of your proudest legacies.

Dr. Joe Busta from the University of South Alabama who was co-chair of the Helen Keller Campaign and his co-chair, Elmer Harris, former CEO of Alabama Power.

Dr. Bob Morris and his team at the Helen Keller Foundation. Dr. Morris devotes weeks of each year restoring sight of children who have lost their sight and is actually a miracle worker today giving the gift of sight.

Dr. Terry Graham, President of the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind, and Lynne Hanner from the Institute.

Among the members who served on the Helen Keller Campaign and the Artist Selection

Committee, the Alabama delegation is honored to have three members of the Keller family: great nephew Bill Johnson, great nephew Warren Johnson, and great grand niece Keller Johnson Thompson.

And of course finally we recognize the outstanding work of the artist, Edward Hlvaka.

We all look forward to the formal unveiling of the Helen Keller statue next Wednesday. It will be a powerful moment for those of us from the State of Alabama at our beautiful Capitol. Let me thank Senator Sessions and Senator Shelby for their support of this resolution and yield back the balance of my time.

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